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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2465
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2585
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3456
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4590
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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#) [CU](#)
SUBJECT: CUBA STEPS UP ITS MISSION IN BOLIVIA

Classified By: Ecopol Counselor Andrew Erickson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Summary: Overt Cuban presence in Bolivia consists primarily of medical assistance and literacy programs. There are an estimated 2,000 Cuban medical personnel in Bolivia, of which 1,200 claim to be doctors. Cuba has funded 11 ophthalmology centers in Bolivia, and the Cuban Government recently announced an expansion of medical outreach through the funding of 23 additional hospitals. Bolivian medical personnel resent Cuban interference in the health sector, as Bolivian doctors are severely underpaid and underemployed. Cuba also helped to launch a literacy campaign in Bolivia in March 2006. The campaign, modeled after Cuba's own literacy program, has received great fanfare in Bolivia, and President Morales is already touting its success in some rural areas. Cuban involvement in medical and educational missions has led to an increased Cuban presence in Bolivia, although exact numbers are unknown. End summary.

Medical Assistance

¶2. (S/NF) The Bolivian Medical Association estimates there are 2,000 medical personnel in Bolivia, of which 1,200 claim to be doctors. Post believes that some Cuban intelligence officials enter Bolivia under the guise of medical and educational missions, but we cannot verify to what degree this occurs. Cuban medical personnel are likely scattered throughout all of Bolivia's nine departments, especially in the more remote, rural areas. President Morales publicly claims that Cuban doctors have assisted more than 1.6 million Bolivians and saved more than 2,350 lives. Morales even prefers Cuban doctors to Bolivian medical personnel for his personal medical needs. On April 5, Morales attended a La Paz clinic where Cuban doctors removed a mole from his left eyelid. (Note: There is no shortage of Bolivian doctors. According to the Bolivian Medical Association, there are 16,000 Bolivian doctors, 10,000 of whom are unemployed. End note). In contrast, when Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera had back surgery on May 1, he was attended by Bolivian

physicians in his hometown of Cochabamba.

13. (U) Cuba has funded 11 opthamology centers in Bolivia. Morales claims that the Cuban eye clinics have performed more than USD \$80 million worth of free operations in 14 months. In a public ceremony in Caracas on April 15, Morales expressed his gratitude for Cuban assistance while taking aim at the U.S. He said, "Cuba is a country that sends troops to save lives, unlike other countries that send troops to end lives. This is the profound difference between Cuba and the United States."

14. (U) The Cuban Government announced on March 25 that they are expanding medical outreach to Bolivia by funding 23 additional hospitals. The hospitals will be scattered throughout 20 municipalities in six departments. Ten of the donated hospitals will include equipment, ten will include equipment and personnel, and three will be reserved for Bolivia's National Police. In mid-April, President Morales and Cuban Ambassador Rafael Dausa inaugurated a Cuban-funded intensive therapy unit in the Camiri municipal hospital, Santa Cruz Department. The unit will reportedly be staffed by Cuban medical personnel until Bolivian specialists are able take over in their place. Prior to the opening of the Camiri intensive therapy unit, emergency patients had to be taken to the departmental capital for care.

15. (SBU) Bolivian medical personnel resent Cuban interference in the health sector as the country's doctors are severely underpaid and underemployed. Health workers shut down public hospitals on April 26, and Bolivian medical professionals began a national strike on May 3 to demand a seven percent increase in salary. Many health workers complain that Cuban medical personnel are operating illegally in Bolivia as they are not accredited to practice medicine in the country. At a late-April meeting of the Medical Confederation of Latin America and the Caribbean (CONFEMEL), the organization denounced foreign interference in any nation's health sector. CONFEMEL's declaration is reminiscent of Cuban medical missions in Bolivia, and the organization even posted its public denouncements in La Paz's leading daily, La Razon. (Note: In December 2006, the World Medical Association issued a similar declaration. End note).

16. (U) While medical professionals resent foreign interference in the health sector, Cuban-funded medical missions and free clinics remain wildly popular with Bolivia's majority poor population.

Literacy Campaign

17. (U) The Cuban-style campaign to eradicate illiteracy was launched in Santa Cruz in March 2006. The Cuban Ambassador (as well as the Venezuelan Ambassador) participated in the inaugural ceremony where President Morales promised to eliminate illiteracy in 30 months. Twelve months later, Morales was already touting the success of Bolivia's Cuban-sponsored literacy campaign. On March 26, Morales declared the town of Tolata, 33 kilometers outside of Cochabamba, to be free of illiteracy. Minister of Education and Culture, Victor Caceres, reported that Tolata is the first completely literate Bolivian municipality. Meanwhile, Bolivian teachers have been clashing with the GOB in recent weeks over salary increases, the establishment of a pension system, and the new education law. On May 7, urban teachers ended their strike in all municipalities except La Paz, in exchange for a six percent salary increase, but rural teachers threatened to begin a 72-hour strike on May 9 if their demands were not met.

Comment

18. (C) Comment: Cuban involvement in medical and educational missions has led to an increased Cuban presence in Bolivia,

although exact numbers are unknown. The expansion of Cuban medical assistance in recent months and the GOB's public praise of Cuban-style literacy programs is an obvious mechanism to garner support for President Morales in the run-up to Constituent Assembly voting and the proposed national elections. Morales' embrace of Cuban support, while well-received and popular with the general population, has alienated Bolivian health care and education workers. End comment.

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